

[NET HUNTERS]

[P. 200-8]

nkusa vine into cord, mainly used for net re-
pairing, are also everyday occupations. The
net hunters use vine much more widely than
the archers who use it for basketry rather than
cordage. Putnam also mentions the use of cer-
tain types of vine that give water. *Njelani* is a
long vine used for making children's swings and
the high swings used by young men mainly dur-
ing the honey season.

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BODY DECORATION

Body decoration and mutilation as described
in the Putnam material is similar to that re-
counted by Schebesta, except that in the paint-
ing of designs on the body Anne Putnam men-
tions the use of *kangay*, a black dye obtained
from the juice of the gardenia fruit (Fig. 30a).
This is applied with a small twig. Use of red and
white is confined to ceremonial occasions. A va-
riety of hats and headdresses is used by the net
hunters, also bracelets, necklaces, combs, and
lip plugs. All of these may be made by the
Mbuti, though often in imitation of village ar-
tifacts (Fig. 30).

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[NET HUNTERS]

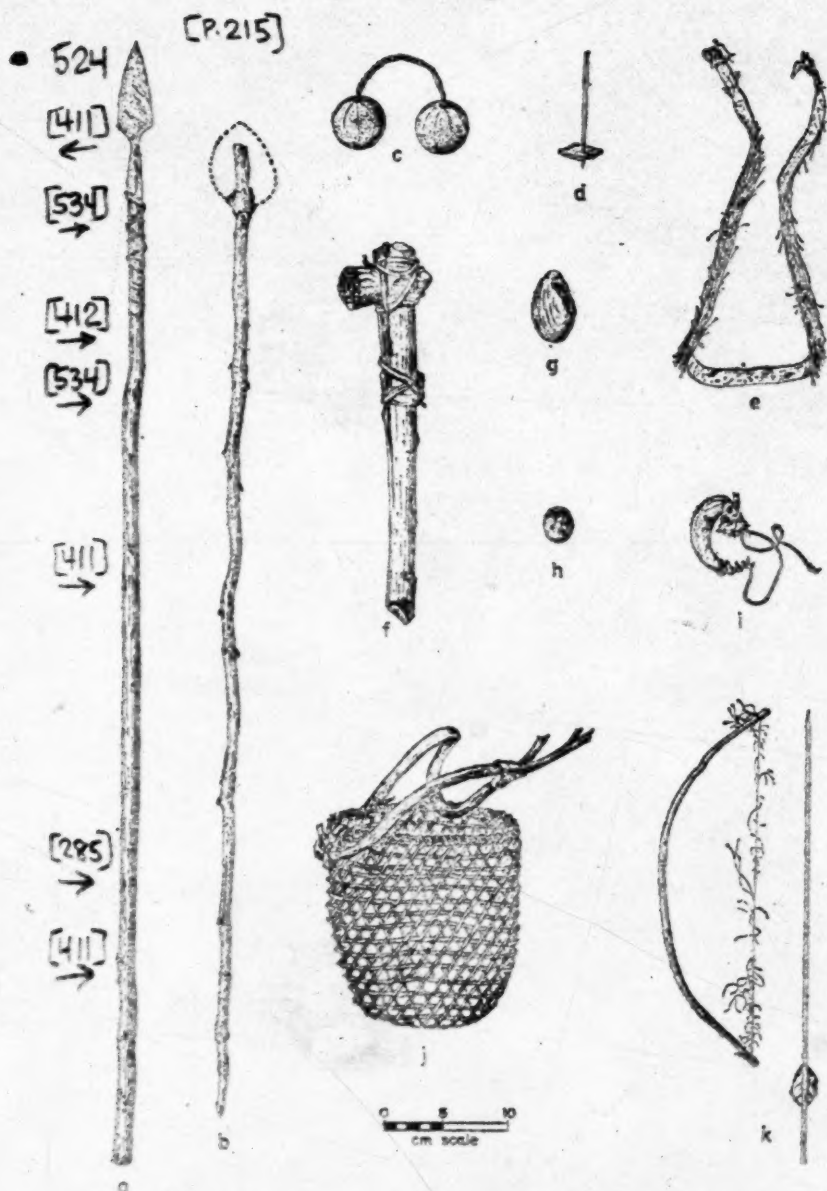


FIG. 45. Toys, net hunters, Epulu District, Central Ituri. a. Spear, *ekonga*. b. Fire spear, *iswakamaboki*. c. Castanets, *kolokkenje*. d. Top, *tekiya*. e. Baby sling, *koko*. f. Bark beater, *kolea*. g-h. Seed whistles, *pho'u*. i. Wrist protector, *aruba*. j. Basket, *so*. k. Bow, *mange*, and arrow, *api*.

262 out the liquid that drains from it (*kombo*) is caught in leaf cups and
252 drunk. Never is any honey wasted, never is it kept or used in the preparation of other foods; what is not consumed on the spot is eaten or drunk the moment it is brought back into camp.

261 There is a craving for honey during the season that never seems to
262 be satisfied. No amount of alternative foods, even meat, can reduce
222 this passion for honey. Each band has its own way of listening for
[825] the telltale sound of bees swarming. Among some, a leaf is rubbed between the hands, which are then rubbed across the forehead to enable the hunter to see the bees high up in their hives. I found this practice among the eastern archers. Elsewhere, throughout the net-hunting
[184] region and also among the western archers, at least, the chameleon
[825] (*ameuli*) is believed to lead the Mbuti to honey by uttering a long-drawn-out throaty cry. Chameleons, however, are not known to be
[136] capable of making any such noise, and the noted ornithologist Dr. James Chapin claims to have tracked this weird sound down to the *Sarothrura elegans*, a bird with a skinny pouch in its neck that enables it to give an unbroken wail lasting fifteen seconds or more.

221 But most noticeable among a people who take the success of
222 hunting and gathering so much for granted is the presence of honey-
53 collecting magic, and an inordinate emphasis on song and dance,
789 legend-telling and other recreational activities. There is no doubt that whatever else it may be, the honey season is also a festive season where celebration is the order of the day, even at the cost of a relatively empty stomach.

221 Some activities are purely recreational, such as spinning tops made
222 of nut sections, and gambling with dried seeds thrown on the ground
• 524 to make up a total number that is a multiple of four. Others are educational, and in particular the honey swing is for training youngsters
[525] in agility at heights, as are the informal contests at climbing dangling
[868] vines. The honey swing is suspended from two high branches, so that it has a long, powerful arc. The youths line up and one jumps into the bend of the vine that forms the seat and sets the swing in motion. As the swing moves backwards, a youth runs forward, catching onto the side of the vine, giving it added momentum. As it carries him off the ground, he throws his legs forward and up over his head and into the swing just as the previous occupant jumps to the ground.

The younger children also play with smaller swings, and they have their own game of climbing saplings until there are so many of them that the young tree bends to the ground. The children then leap to

THE ECONOMY

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the ground, and any who are timid or slow get whisked back into the air again as the sapling rebounds, and are much laughed at for their failure. 221
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The tug-of-war separates the sexes, and although it is primarily an adult game, youths and children sometimes join in. However, it is likely to become rough, and youngsters are not encouraged. A man may, and sometimes does, pull on the side of the women, to make a better match, but he may also go to their side as if to help and then start pulling in the opposite direction. It is then up to the women to decide whether they are better off continuing to pull, or whether it is worth their while for two or three of them to attack the man. They themselves will sometimes leave their side and go to the men's side and simply try and pull them away from the vine rope. No restrictions were evident, and each contest continued until the complete collapse of one side or the other. If anything, among the Epulu net-hunters the women seemed to win more frequently. An immense amount of energy was dissipated in this way, yet one tug-of-war would follow another for sometimes as long as an hour. 221
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The division of sexes visible in this contest, and the same implied symbolic conflict, was also visible in the *ekokomea* dance which I saw among the Epulu net-hunters during two honey seasons; but I have also seen the dance in the same band during the course of a *molimo* festival. I found it to be known among all other bands I visited, though I never actually saw it practiced among the archers. With these other bands it is said to be danced on occasions of great importance to the band, such occasions not being specified. 221
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Ekokomea involves a reversal of the sexes, and everyone from the oldest to the youngest may take part. Usually the children follow the youths and adults and imitate the dance on their own. Women put heavy objects in the bark cloth between their legs and stride along in a way that emphasizes the swinging motion of their "genitalia." The men indicate their assumed female sex by performing divers actions typical only of women, often pretending to clean their private parts as women do. Both men and women, but mainly men, may take a leaf or a small strip of bark cloth or skin, make a slit in it, and proudly display it, occasionally putting a finger through the slit so as to leave the symbolism in no doubt.

The dance begins spontaneously, without preparation, with two or three individuals assuming the reversed roles and marching in line from hut to hut, singing, "*Ekokomes*." No satisfactory translation

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578 Everyone was tired of disputes in the camp, and they turned on Kengé and told him it was he who was a bad husband. He promptly said, "I shall tell my mother; I shall tell her everything, and she will come here." His mother was notoriously argumentative, and the thought of having another disputant on their hands was too much. There were unanimous shouts of disapproval, whereupon Kengé said, "So you let the Lesé Mbuti join empty Cephu in our territory, Cephu who always hunts against us and should be turned out completely and forever, yet you do not want your own mother-in-law to come and live with you. What kind of Mbuti are you?" He went inside his hut and after a few muffled cries and sounds of blows, there were other sounds, less offensive, and in a half hour or so Kengé and his wife came out together, making a great show of friendliness, peering into Mbaaka's hut and laughing loudly at them for fighting so much.

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152 DISPUTES CONCERNING TRIVIA

A headache, a hungry stomach, a painful leg, a leaking hut or a damp forest—almost any kind of discomfort is likely to make an Mbuti irritable, and he will pick a quarrel with ease and readiness so that he can make his heart feel better, as they say. It is known to be bad to keep things concealed, so there is no particular disgrace in voicing suspicions and revealing antagonisms, particularly if it is done quietly. Few, however, managed to make their heart feel better without creating a great deal of noise and making everyone else feel considerably worse.

578 Most such disputes, and there were likely to be several every day, died as they began, in complete indecision. The following are typical instances:

• [524] 26. A small girl, playing in imitation of the boy's *nkumbi*, play-
[821] fully whipped some of the men, including her uncle, Masalito. Masalito was enraged and hit her, which started a fight between his age mates—that is, the young hunters.

[534] 27. Pepei fought another youth with sticks because the other told
[562] him to beat the *banja* sticks, and Pepei said he was not a woman to be ordered around. Tungana's wife then beat Pepei, saying that women do not get ordered around, only children, and that is why nobody will marry him.

[593] 28. Kengé beat his sister because she caught cold.

29. A girl returning from the village related how there was an

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854 wrong, or fondle him and feed him with delicacies if he is quiet and
861 gives them no trouble. He knows his real mother and father, of
867 course, and has a special affection for them and they for him, but
from an early age he learns that he is the child of them all, for they
are all children of the forest.

857 When a hunting party goes off there are always people left in the
[512] camp—usually some of the older men and women, some children,
and perhaps one or two younger men and women. The children
[367] always have their own playground, called *bopi*, a few yards off from
[192] the main camp. At Apa Lelo it was on the shore where the river
twisted around an island and one branch of it cut in almost between
Cephu's camp and the main camp. The water was fairly shallow
there, and all day long the children splashed and wallowed about
to their heart's content. If they tired of that, they had a couple of
vine swings in their *bopi*; one was a small one for younger children,
and the other was hung from two tall trees. Infants watched with
envy as the older children swung wildly about, climbing high up on
the vine strands and performing all sorts of acrobatics.

There were always trees for the youngsters to climb, and this is
one of the main sports even for those not yet old enough to walk
properly. The great game is for half a dozen or more children to
climb to the top of a young tree, bending it down until its top touches
the ground. Then they all leap off at once, and if anyone is too slow
he goes flying back upward as the tree springs upright, to the jeers
and laughter of his friends.

861 Like children everywhere, Pygmy children love to imitate their
868 adult idols. This is the beginning of their schooling, for the adults
will always encourage and help them. What else is there for them to
• [524] learn except to grow into good adults? So a fond father will make a
tiny bow for his son, and arrows of soft wood with blunt points. He
[285] may also give him a strip of a hunting net. A mother will delight
000 herself and her daughter by weaving a miniature carrying basket. At

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000all we could carry to bring back for dinner. The hill was ringed with streams, each one fresh and clear until it reached the swamp.

On the way back, having made a complete circuit, we were just nearing the camp when I noticed a huge old tree, one of those with great buttress roots joining the trunk some fifteen feet above the ground. It was completely dead, standing up white and naked among all the greenery, its lifelessness seeming all the more pitiable in the midst of such luxuriance. Most of its branches had already come crashing down, and only one or two jagged stumps were still jutting out from the main body. Kenge gave it a critical look; then peered in the direction of the camp a few yards below. "It should just miss our house!" he said quite seriously.

As a matter of fact it did. One night we were awakened by a sharp cracking sound, followed by a loud groan. This was repeated, and after a while a number of Pygmies, each with a flaming brand in his hands, stood out in the clearing, listening. "It's not going to fall yet," they said, and went back to sleep. Kenge had not even bothered to get up, but I could not sleep. I must have laid there for a couple of hours, listening to cracks as sharp as a rifle going off, and the intermittent groaning. Then the groaning got louder and more continuous, and in a flash Kenge was up and outside, yelling at me to follow. Just as I cleared the doorway the old tree came down, slowly and reluctantly, clutching at all the lesser trees that stood in its way. They were living, and it was dead, but it smashed its way on downward to the ground. The tremendous din of its collapse was followed by a light pattering of broken branches and twigs, and then silence. Kenge said, "You see, it did miss our house." So it had, by no more than six feet.

824 For the first day or two I noticed the children playing in a vine
• 524 swing that they had rigged up for themselves, and I watched the
734 crippled Lizabeti as she eyed them longingly. Several times, when the other children had gone scampering off into the forest I saw her

THE DREAM WORLD

pull herself over to the swing, slowly and painfully, and hoist herself almost upright by catching onto the vine with her hands, using what strength she had left in her good leg, which was fast withering through lack of use. It suddenly occurred to me to ask Kenge why Pygmies never made crutches. He said that they either got better with the use of a stick, or else they just crawled until they died. "What good is anyone who can't walk?" he asked.

I went to Asofalinda and asked her if she would let me try to teach Lizabeti to walk on crutches. The old woman was in one of her most truculent moods and severely said no. The white doctor had tried once, and Lizabeti had only got worse. Besides, the one leg was completely disjointed now, she said, and the other would be equally useless soon. I tried to explain that I was not going to try to cure the girl but just to help her get around more easily. Asofalinda asked me what crutches were like, but then she immediately became severe again and said that everyone knew it was impossible to walk on one leg.

I went off into the forest with Kenge and we cut two pairs of crutches, carefully choosing sticks with a wide fork that would not pinch under the arm. Then we cut a third pair, the right size for Lizabeti. We padded the forks with leaves. I showed Kenge how to use them, holding one leg doubled up behind me. He was delighted and was soon swinging himself unsteadily over the ground. When I thought that we both had had enough practice we returned to the camp and showed the sticks to Asofalinda, explaining them to her. We then performed, circling the camp twice without mishap. By this time the children were shrieking encouragement, and parents came running to see what the noise was all about. We performed once again for Masisi. When Asofalinda still hesitated Masisi simply went into her hut, grabbed the terrified Lizabeti and carried her outside. He told Asofalinda that this was not medicine, it was just common

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621 of me. Masisi, still breathing fire and fury about the treachery of his relatives, came to visit us from time to time; otherwise he kept strictly to his own camp.

221 And so, after the Pygmies had taken advantage of the one season
621 they know, a season which allows them to forget about the cares of communal hunting and the need for constant co-operation, the camp was beginning to come together again. Every year this splitting up takes place, and every year the forest draws its people back together. Whatever frictions had existed were soon healed; a new year was about to begin. Before this camp ended, Masisi would have found some excuse to move a little farther north. Ekianga was already talking of shifting a few hundred yards south, and Cephu would make up his mind to jump this way or that. Everyone knew it, and within a week of arriving at Apa Kadiketu they were talking about where they would build their next camp, and how it would be one camp again—until the next honey season.

114 But I would never know that next camp, so I made the most of my last home in the forest, sharing it as always with a good and constant friend. Maliamo set up house in Masisi's camp, and sometimes Kenge stayed there, sometimes in the main camp. At all times the forest was full of the song and dance of life. The games special to
221 the honey season filled the daylight hours and at dusk there was the
524 dance of the honeybees. Tremendous vine swings were slung from
526 the highest branches, and on these the youths practiced their acrobatics, leaping and somersaulting in the air. When a vine broke it was used for interminable games of tug of war, men against women. But there was a conspicuous lack of gallantry in this particular game, for if either side saw that it was losing ground it sent a saboteur into the other ranks. It is difficult to concentrate on pulling at a line
221 when someone is flirting with you—as Pygmies do. But best of all
525 was the dance. Once again the men and the women divided, and